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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9175
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUCNOSC/OSCE POST COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2650
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0477
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0515
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0537
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2225
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0264
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1021
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0346
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1751
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0526

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000830

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN PROTESTS "NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES"

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Embassy received a diplomatic note dated August 7 protesting the series of articles C.J. Chivers published in "The New York Times" after he accompanied Commander CENTCOM Admiral Fallon to Turkmenistan June 19-20. The dip note pointedly reminded Embassy Ashgabat it had supported Chivers' inclusion in the Fallon delegation, and concluded, as a result of Chivers' articles, Turkmenistan's "honor in the international arena has been diminished." The diplomatic note requested "the U.S. side to prevent such actions from happening in the future."

¶2. (C) During his weekly business meeting with Foreign Ministry Americas Department Director Serdar Bashimov on August 10, Charge said he was disinclined to reply to the dip note, but solicited Bashimov's advice. Bashimov agreed the better part of valor was not to reply.

¶3. (C) Charge told Bashimov Turkmenistan's international reputation is so damaged because of the policies of recent years that it will take a long time before foreign journalists begin to catch up with current reality, especially because Turkmenistan's rigid visa regime makes it so difficult for foreign correspondents to enter the country freely and spend enough unhindered time to gain a deeper understanding. He reminded Bashimov the United States cannot and does not "control" U.S. journalists. He added that a hallmark of democracy is a free press that can criticize government and uncover corruption and other problems that harm the lives of citizens and hinder the economic and political development of the nation.

¶4. (C) Bashimov looked pained. He said, "You know I understand that, but many, many here don't. Articles like

these have the potential to harm the positive trends in our new bilateral relationship."

¶15. (C) COMMENT: Assuming more foreign journalists gain access to Turkmenistan, there will be more "negative reporting" that will set the Turkmenistan government's teeth on edge. We will use each opportunity to continue to nudge this government toward a better understanding of freedom of the press. Considering the appalling quality of their government-controlled media, that day of enlightenment is probably far off. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND